

EDITORIAL:

Consumerism & Science Education

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Responses

Please consider writing a response to this paper in the WePaste forum for JASTE 3.2 (www.wepaste.org).

Several authors suggest that, in the last four decades or so, the global economy has shifted from an orientation towards production and distribution of goods and services addressing people's needs to focus on production of consumer *desires* — aimed largely at people with few needs (Barber, 2007; McMurtry, 1999; Usher, 2010). In *Consumed*, Barber (2007), for example, suggests that a veritably 'religious' attachment to consumption of goods and services is enhanced by the process of *infantilization*; that is, a double-barreled effort to regress adults to and inhibit children from developing past child-like personal possessiveness. He claims that infantilization features at least three major techniques, including: *easiness* (e.g., watching instead of doing); *simplicity* (e.g., viewing images vs. reading); and, *speediness* (e.g., rapidly changing focus, instead of extended involvement). This orientation, then, seems very powerful; perhaps hegemonic. Many or most societal entities contribute to and are affected by this orientation towards self-indulgency. Key to this zeitgeist appear to be science and technology education and fields of professional science and engineering. Their involvement seems to be both material and semiotic. Science education tends to serve as a 'gatekeeper' subject, selecting potential engineers and scientists, for example, who can serve as knowledge builders for financiers. Particularly in knowledge-based economies (societies), such professionals often then are pressured to assist in manufacturing and dissemination of *abstractions* — such as a sense of 'cool' — that may become semiotic objects of consumer desire (Ziman, 2000). In harmony with this tack, meanwhile, school science often tends to generate citizens with unrealistically positive conceptions of scientists and engineers and their products — a state that may best prepare them to serve as compliant workers and enthusiastic and naïve consumers of products and services (Giroux & Giroux, 2006). This complex consumerist network appears to be facilitated largely through creation and consumption of semiotic signs (abstractions) that, together, form a *simulacrum* — a 'hyper-real' world in which meanings are so detached from the world of phenomena that they and people attached to/identifying with them can be manipulated to serve powerful societal members' interests (Baudrillard, 1998; Norris, 2011; Usher, 2010). In this concentration of power, there appear to be many negative side-effects for the wellbeing of individuals, societies and environments. At the same time, the source of such hardships seem hidden from most of us. In perhaps an over-statement, McMurtry (1999) suggested that this situation is like cancer — a state in which community members (body cells) mutate to become organism-destroying, despite the body continuing to recognize the mutated (cancer) cells as 'part of us.' This seems abhorrent. Nevertheless, Bakan (2004) claims that externalizing (shedding) costs (including hardships), although legal, is a pathological condition of current capitalist systems that he advises must be reversed.

In this Special Issue of the *Journal for Activism in Science & Technology Education*, authors have reacted, in their own special ways, to issues like those described above.

As always, we invite critical and creative feedback on these contributions in the Forum of PASTE, specifically for this issue (JASTE 3.2).

Thanks

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